

MARICOPA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MINUTE BOOK

**SPECIAL SESSION
February 25, 2002**

The Board of Supervisors of Maricopa County, Arizona convened at 10:00 a.m., February 25, 2002, in the Board of Supervisors' Auditorium, 201 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, Arizona, with the following members present: Don Stapley, Chairman; Fulton Brock, Vice Chairman; Andy Kunasek, Max W. Wilson, Mary Rose Wilcox, Fran McCarroll, Clerk of the Board; Connie Copeland, Minutes Coordinator. Also present: David Smith, County Administrative Officer; and Paul Golab, Deputy County Attorney. Votes of the Members will be recorded as follows: (aye-no-absent-abstain).

DISCUSSION AND ACTION: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES – APPROPRIATION AND TRANSFER OF FUNDS TO MITIGATE THE ROOF RAT OUTBREAK IN MARICOPA COUNTY.

Item: Appropriation and transfer of up to \$68,726 of FY 2001-2002 General Government Contingency Funds to General Government-General Fund Programs – Vector Control to mitigate the Roof Rat outbreak in Maricopa County. (A2128)

Chairman Stapley opened the meeting to discuss the infestation of Roof Rats in the Arcadia neighborhood of Maricopa County. He called upon Al Brown, Director, Environmental Services (ES), for his report. Mr. Brown introduced John Townsend, Manager of Vector Control, and Dr. Jonathan Weisbuch, Director of Public Health. Mr. Brown thanked the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for their expertise and assistance in assessing the rodent problem. USDA provided the slide presentation on the Roof Rats and sent Dr. Penulty to assist Maricopa County.

Mr. Brown provided a historical overview of the problem. He reported the prolific breeding of Roof Rats and explained their general biology. Roof Rats can travel 100 to 300 feet searching for food. The rats can often be seen running along utility lines or fences. Mr. Brown stressed that Roof Rats are very adaptable and can damage citrus trees, insulation, and electric wiring. They have also been reported to get into cars and attics.

Mr. Brown emphasized that the Arizona Environmental Health Services advised that the disease risk is relatively low. Although Roof Rats can be vectors of disease, there is no evidence of communicable diseases at this time. Those tested were found to be without fleas. Fleas can carry communicable diseases like the Bubonic plague. Mr. Brown reported that the public has been notified to block access to attics, storage sheds, or other places where the rodents can enter. The public has been asked to remove debris and fruit on the ground in the area.

Mr. Brown explained there are four ways to minimize the rodent population: toxicants (poison baits), fumigants, trapping, and predators. He noted that last year the County received only two complaints; this year the County had 128 complaints filed. Maricopa County has coordinated with USDA and with the affected cities since January 2002. The State made their lab and expertise available. The County has set 73 traps and caught 38 specimens identified as Roof Rats. In a meeting held at Ingleside Elementary School on February 13, 2002, where approximately 500 residents attended, approximately half identified themselves as having infestations.

Mr. Brown reported that there is valuable information for the public on the County web site at www.maricopa.gov, and they may also report problems on-line. The Environmental Services staff have also taken information door-to-door. Representatives have met with local schools and neighborhood associations to inform the public. The County is enlisting and recruiting community volunteers to help

with the cleanup. The County has arranged for citrus donations to local food banks. The State is certifying Vector Control Officers as pest control operators as required by Statute.

Mr. Brown explained the need for contingency funds to prepare and place 10,000 bait stations in the area. He identified the target area as 24th Street on the west and 68th Street on the east. The area is from Camelback Road on the north to McDowell Road on the south. The plan is to attack the rodent population from the perimeters and work inward. Six Environmental Services officers have been assigned to this project, and the Flood Control District is providing certified officers to assist. Mr. Brown advised that this is an ambitious project. The County has little experience with Roof Rats as this is the first infestation.

Chairman Stapley asked about the recent success rate of the traps already set. Mr. Townsend explained that a fifty-percent success rate is deceiving because the traps were placed on the property of people who identified a specific infestation.

In response to questions from Supervisor Kunasek, Mr. Brown reported that SRP, and the cities of Phoenix and Scottsdale have assisted with joint trash collection. He described the traps as PVC pipe mounted on a pole or tree with an opening just large enough for the rat. Officers must come back periodically to replace the bait. Mr. Brown advised that the bait product has a low toxicity; non-targeted animals would have to digest much more than is physically possible to be poisoned. Other animals would have to consume large amounts of rats who had ingested the poison to be negatively impacted.

Supervisor Kunasek thanked the public for their efforts in helping to clean up property. He expressed added appreciation to staff and the State for helping to respond to this rodent problem. Supervisor Kunasek also thanked Mayor Rimza, City of Phoenix, for the City's assistance in helping to remove debris and trash. He also acknowledged State Representative Deb Gullet, District 18, for attending the meeting and for her support.

In response to questions from Supervisor Wilson, Mr. Brown described the efforts to suppress the rodent population. He noted that the rodents have more difficulty existing in the summer heat and advised that the heat and the bait traps will suppress the population. Mr. Brown reported that since the infestation has been made public, reports of rat problems have come in from all parts of the County. The areas in the West Valley and around South Mountain have identified Cotton Rats and Wood Rats but not Roof Rats. So far the infestation appears to be contained in the East Valley.

Supervisor Brock thanked Mr. Brown for the information on the rodent population. He asked what other services were provided by Vector Control operations. Mr. Brown briefly described the efforts to reduce mosquitoes and flies because of the diseases associated with both insects. In response to additional questions from Supervisor Brock, Mr. Brown advised the public to call 911 if they suspected an Africanized Bee population in their neighborhood.

Mr. Brown again thanked the cities for the dumpsters and roll-off bins used to remove fruit and debris and the State for use of their labs. Dr. Weisbuch emphasized that the County would not be able to eradicate all the rodents but would make every effort to bring the rodent population as low as possible. Maricopa County with the community assistance must identify the rodent harborages and food supplies in order to effectively target the eradication efforts.

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Supervisor Wilcox asked that staff place traps in the surrounding areas to detect if the rodent population spreads. Mr. Brown responded that the County would place live traps wherever complaints were received. He asked the public to call the complaint line, 602-506-6616 to report problems. Supervisor Wilcox also suggested that debris and fruit left on vacant properties be removed.

Mr. Brown thanked Supervisor Wilcox for the suggestion and reported that Phoenix was also attacking the problem in public areas. Homeowners associations may be able to help cleanup vacant private property. Supervisor Wilcox suggested that the City may have records of absentee homeowners for notification purposes. Supervisor Kunasek suggested that realtors might be able to help identify absentee homeowners. Supervisor Wilcox expressed her thanks for the County's proactive efforts. She re-emphasized her concern that the infestation not spread to other areas of Phoenix.

Dr. Weisbuch emphasized the need to eliminate the rodent food supply, set the baits, keep track of rat movements, and attack from the outside inward. He stressed that the summer heat should also be a factor to reduce the population. Mr. Brown again shared the web site address and phone number. Chairman Stapley encouraged public input by phone (602-506-6616) or on-line at www.maricopa.gov.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Paul Barnes, representing the Neighborhood Coalition of Greater Phoenix, Arcadia Camelback Mountain Homeowners Association, Arcadia Osborn Homeowners Association, and the Arcadia Ingleside Homeowners Association, thanked County staff for their efforts to help eliminate the rats. He thanked the Arcadia Water Company for providing equipment and communication access to their web site and hot line. Mr. Barnes also thanked the City of Phoenix for its assistance in providing unscheduled bulk trash pickups and rollout bins. Mr. Barnes stated that the community realizes that the rats may not be completely eradicated, but appreciates the coordinated effort. He acknowledged that although the problem is overwhelming, the community effort to cleanup the amount of trash that had accumulated in the area and the increased community spirit has been beneficial. Using the example of one vacant property with seventy abandoned trees, Mr. Barnes stated that community volunteers would do the clean up.

Mr. Richard Bouricious, a neighbor in the area of 46th Street and Oak, stated that government should spend its dollars to protect the public from rat infestation. He emphasized the dangerous situation that could arise. He thanked Vector Control for their efforts in his community.

Supervisor Kunasek explained that the Board must receive information and vote before approving any expenditure of tax dollars. Acknowledging consideration of the County's past financial problems, Supervisor Kunasek added that he would support additional funds if necessary to help solve the rodent problem.

State Representative Deb Gullet thanked the Board of Supervisors for their assistance with the rodents. She stated that the infestation complaints had increased from those in the area of 36th Street to 24th Street. Representative Gullet reported that the State had contacted the Indian Community and the Pima and Yuma Counties to alert their agriculture communities about the problem. She added that the Realtors Association has over 20,000 members and should be a good resource in identifying homeowners. Representative Gullet also thanked Mr. Brown and Mr. Townsend for their work.

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After hearing the presentation and public comment, a motion was made by Supervisor Kunasek, seconded by Supervisor Brock, and unanimously carried to approve an appropriation and transfer of up to \$68,726 of FY 2001-02 General Government-General Contingency funds to General Government-General Fund Programs Vector Control to mitigate the Roof Rat outbreak in Maricopa County.

MEETING ADJOURNED

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Don Stapley, Chairman of the Board

ATTEST:

Fran McCarroll, Clerk of the Board